

# **COPING IN TIMES OF SPIRITUAL DECLENSION**

**Editor**

A letter received last year from a correspondent in Northumberland complained: "Presently in the N.E. of England I am without fellowship and a place of worship. What we have are several churches professing to be under the banner 'Reformed,' yet their practice in doctrine and worship is far removed from the truth." As long ago as 1987 a friend from South Humberside wrote in a similar vein: "Sad to say there is no Reformed fellowship of any kind that I know of in our town or the surrounding area. And that is an area with a population in excess of 100,000 people. Most evangelical witness in the area is arminian, more often than not of the neo-pentecostal variety. We attend a Methodist church locally, more out of habit than conviction... but we have nowhere else to go. The only alternative would be to stay at home which would deny us any fellowship or access to the sacraments."

Letters such as these are typical of a number that arrive on the Editor's desk from time to time. It is clear that the present situation leaves many of the Lord's people feeling isolated, starved of spiritual nourishment and deprived of Christian fellowship. Indeed, it is probably true that many readers of this Journal have had to face problems such as these to a greater or lesser extent at some time or other in their Christian experience.

What can be done to counter such difficulties and help preserve our faith in an all-wise Providence and in a sovereign and a gracious God? The following are seven suggestions, to which others could no doubt be added. Rather than adopting an attitude of despair it is surely preferable to look to our glorious Saviour and seek to win through to better days in the years to come.

## **1. Under no circumstances neglect the daily reading of the Scriptures and personal communion with God.**

In his great affliction Job wrote: "I have esteemed the words of his mouth more than my necessary food" (23:12). Neglect of Bible reading and prayer is the first and primary way in which Satan attempts to trip us up and destroy our faith and it is

essential to resist this temptation to the utmost of our ability. We shall then be able to say with the prophet Jeremiah: " Thy words were found, and I did eat them; and thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart" (15:16).

**2. If at all practicable observe the practice of (daily) worship with the family.**

The performance of family worship is sadly an unknown practice for many Christians particularly in England, and yet there was a time in history when it was the mainstay of our Reformed heritage. Family worship is a bond which unites the individual believer with other members of his family, particularly his wife and children. Listen to the great John Knox: "Brethren, you are ordained of God to rule and govern your own houses in his true fear, and according to his word. Within your houses, I say, in some cases you are bishops and kings; your wife, children, servants, and family are your bishopric and charge. Of you it shall be required how carefully and diligently you have always instructed them in God's true knowledge, how you have studied to plant virtue in them, and [to] repress vice. And therefore I say, you must make them partakers in reading, exhorting, and in making common prayers, which I would in every house were used once a day at least."

**3. Make as much use as possible of good Reformed literature for spiritual edification.**

Although these are days of declension and we may feel we are travelling through a wilderness, God has seen fit in His providence to provide an abundant supply of spiritual 'manna.' Besides a wealth of literature from many well known publishers such as the Banner of Truth Trust and others, the British Reformed Fellowship has access to material distinctly setting forth the Reformed faith in line with our own position and subordinate standards. Readers can apply to the editorial office for copies of the booklist or, alternatively, order directly from Rev Ron Hanko, 7 Lislunnan Road, Kells, Ballymena BT42 3NR, N Ireland (Tel: 0266-891851).

**4. If circumstances prevent the hearing of sound Reformed preaching, take the opportunity of listening to Reformed ministry on tape.**

Modern inventions are not all bad and the advent of the tape recorder and the video recorder has brought the best of Reformed preaching within the reach of even the most isolated believer. Mr Desmond Callender holds a considerable stock of sermons on a

wide variety of texts and subjects and he is only too willing to co-operate with your needs. Tapes can be either purchased or borrowed free of charge from: 127 Cregagh Road, Belfast BT6 0LA (Tel: 0232-453771).

**5. Make an effort to attend Reformed services and meetings where at all possible.**

Books and tape recordings are no substitute for live preaching, and attendance at such activities serves to strengthen the faith of the child of God and also provides him with the enrichment of fellowship with like-minded believers. Owing to geographical circumstances this may entail considerable inconvenience in time, travel and expense. Yet, we shall be the poorer if we shrink from making such sacrifices and prefer to stay at home. Many good meetings are held throughout the country and advertised in the Evangelical Times and other periodicals. Moreover, the BRF organises occasional One-Day Conventions and details of these are displayed within the pages of this journal.

**6. Foster Christian fellowship with other believers (Heb 10:25).**

This may seem a trite suggestion in view of the opening remarks and yet it is surprising what can be achieved. By attending meetings we provide others with the opportunity of having fellowship with us (and conversely, by staying at home we deprive them of this benefit). Other Christians can also be contacted by letter and by phone. Why not set aside money for the phone bill as part of Christian stewardship? There is, of course, nothing like personal contact and occasions such as conferences and Christian holidays are ideal times for spiritual refreshment. In this connection, have you considered our own Family Holiday Conference in August? If finance is a problem we would be happy to discuss the matter with you; if you have made other (secular) holiday arrangements, are you sure your priorities are correct?

**7. Pray for the greater prosperity of the Reformed cause in our land.**

In Luke 10:2 our Lord tells His disciples: "The harvest truly is great, but the labourers are few; pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he would send forth labourers into his harvest." This is our duty today also and it is the only hope for a long term solution to our plight. In the words of the prophet Isaiah: "Ye that make mention of the LORD, keep not silence, and give him no rest, till he establish, and till he make Jerusalem a praise in the earth" (62:6-7). May we all be given grace so to do!